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Blommaert, Jan

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#justsaying on Twitter

by

Jan Blommaert[©]

(Tilburg University)

j.blommaert@tilburguniversity.edu

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Formatting online actions:

#justsaying on Twitter

Jan Blommaert

Abstract

The hashtag #justsaying is one of Twitter's global stock hashtags. The hashtag is nontopical and appears to fulfill a complex range of metapragmatic framing functions. In this paper, I shall look at Dutch-language tweets in which the hashtag is being used as a fully enregistered 'translingual' framing device, and I will attempt an analysis focused on the specific kinds of communicative actions it marks and organizes. I shall use the notion of formatting as the point of departure: hashtags, as part of an innovative online scripted register, can be seen as formatting devices that introduce, proleptically, a recognizable framing effect on the statement (the tweet), often as a reframing response to other statements giving keys for complex and multiple but equally formatted forms of uptake. The hashtag, thus, appears to have powerful interactional structuring effects in formatting specific lines of action.

Keywords online-offline, social media, formatted action, Twitter, hashtags, interactionism, translingualism

1. Translingualism in the online-offline nexus

Three substantive claims underlie the argument in this paper.¹*One*: in considering contemporary forms of translingualism one can neither avoid online sites of scripted interaction as loci of research, nor the online-offline nexus as an area of phenomenal innovation. *Two*: approaching such online forms of translingual interaction can benefit substantially from a radically action-centered approach, rather than from an approach privileging participants and their identity features, or privileging the linguistic/semiotic resources deployed in translingual events. And *three*: addressing online forms of translingual interaction from this perspective can reveal core features of contemporary social life and serve as a sound basis for constructing innovative social theory.

Of the three claims, the first one is by now widely shared (see e.g. Li Wei & Zhu Hua, this volume). There is an increasing awareness amongst students of language in society that the

¹I dedicate this paper to the memory of Charles Goodwin, a source of inspiration and an engaging interlocutor for several decades, who sadly passed away while I was developing the analysis reported here. This paper is part of a project I call "Online with Garfinkel", in which I explore the potential of action-centered analyses of online-offline communication. A precursor of the project is Blommaert (2018). I am grateful to Piia Varis for feedback on a draft version of this text.

online social world has by now become an integrated part of the sociolinguistic economies of societies worldwide, and that the zone in which we situate our investigations should now best be defined as the online-offline nexus, with phenomena from the online world interacting with those of the offline world and vice versa. There are the specific rescaling and chronotopic features of online communication, where interaction is, as a rule not an exception, no longer tied to physical co-presence and effectively shared timespace; and where interactions as a rule not an exception include translocal and transtemporal rhizomatic uptake (cf. Tagg, Seargeant & Brown 2017; boyd 2014). And there are the outspokenly multimodal default characteristics of online communication. Taken together, it is evident that online communication must be the locus of intense translingualism. My first claim gestures towards the theme of this collection: the online-offline nexus must turn translingualism into the *rule*, the normal, ordinary and unremarkable sociolinguistic state of affairs.

The two other claims might demand somewhat more attention. The second claim – an action-centered perspective on online interaction – is grounded in (but transcends) a serious methodological problem complicating research: the indeterminacy of participant identities online. Given the widespread use of aliases and avatars on, for instance, social media platforms, nothing can be taken for granted regarding who exactly is involved in interactions. Whether we are interacting with a man or woman, a young or an old person, a local or nonlocal one, someone communicating in his/her ‘native’ or ‘first’ language: none of this can be conclusively established. This straightforward feature of online interactions destabilizes much of what we grew accustomed to in social studies, including sociolinguistic research. It makes us aware that our sociological imagination strongly hinged on the self-evident transparency of who people are, the communities they are members of, the languages that characterize them ethnolinguistically and sociolinguistically. The sociological sample – one of these key inventions of 20th century social science – cannot be reliably drawn from online data.

Thus we find ourselves in a research situation in which little can be said a priori about participants and resources involved in social action. The action itself, however, can be observed and examined, and my second claim is to put the analysis of actions central in online-offline nexus research as a firm empirical basis for theory construction (cf. Szabla & Blommaert 2018). My third claim tags onto that: it is by looking at actions, and at how such actions effectively *produce* participants and resources, that we can get a glimpse of

elementary patterns of social behavior through interaction – an opportunity for retheorizing our field. The target of this paper is to empirically demonstrate that.

I shall do so by looking at a common feature of online interaction: the use of hashtags, in this case on Twitter. The point I am seeking to make is that hashtags, as an entirely new feature in interaction interfering with established ones into a translingual whole, can be shown to be subject to rather clear and strict functions and norms of deployment. In Garfinkel's (2002) terms, they can be shown to involve *formatted actions* with a high degree of normative recognizability, turning them into transparent framing devices in Twitter interactions.

2. Hashtags and translingualism

If we see translingualism (*pace* the editors of this collection) as the fluid movement between and across languages or – more broadly – semiotic systems, hashtags definitely can serve as prime instances of translingualism. As a feature of social media scripted discourse, the construction “# + word(s)” is a 21st century innovation. Surely the sign “#” itself was used before the advent of social media: it was, for instance, a symbol on dial phones and was widely used elsewhere as a graphic symbol indicating numbers or, in old-school proofreading practices, indicating a blank space to be inserted in the text. But as we shall see, the social media use of hashtags cannot be seen as an extension of those previous forms of usage. When social media emerged, the hashtag was a free-floating resource that could be functionally redetermined and redeployed in a renewed sociolinguistic system. The fact that the symbol was not tied to a particular language or graphic system such as English or Cyrillic script made it, like the “@” sign, a polyvalent and user-friendly resource, capable of becoming part of global social media discursive repertoires – a process I called ‘supervernacularization’, (Blommaert 2012).² This means that such symbols can be incorporated – by translanguaging actions – in a nearly unlimited range of language-specific expressions while retaining similar or identical functions.

² The point that the widespread availability of online technologies has reshaped the sociolinguistic system is missed by some critics of notions such as translanguaging, who point to the prior existence of formally similar or identical forms of language and/or script to argue that there is nothing ‘new’ happening. In such critiques, Hymes’ (1996) important warning is disregarded: that the study of language is not merely a study of the *linguistic* system – the formal aspects of language, say – but also and even more importantly the study of the *sociolinguistic* system in which language forms are being distributed, functionally allocated and deployed in concrete social circumstances. The arrival of the internet has caused a worldwide change in the sociolinguistic system, provoking enormous amounts of sociolinguistically new phenomena. And even if such phenomena have *linguistic* precursors, they do not have any *sociolinguistic* ones. See Blommaert (2018) for a discussion.

While the use of hashtags has by now become a standard feature of several social media applications (think of Facebook and Instagram) its usage is most strongly embedded in Twitter. Hashtags there tie together and construct topical units: within the strict confines of message length on Twitter, Hashtags enable users to connect their individual tweets to large thematically linked bodies of tweets. In that sense – but I shall qualify this in a moment – their function, broadly taken, is *contextualization*: individual tweets can be offered to audiences as understandable within the topical universe specified by the hashtag. Thus, the “#MeToo” hashtag (one of the most trending hashtags since the 2017 Harvey Weinstein scandal) ties together millions of individual tweets, produced in a variety of languages around the world, within the topical universe of gender-related sexual misconduct and abuse. As a consequence, within Twitter analytics, hashtags are used to define what is “trending” or “viral”, and other forms of big data mining on social media likewise use hashtags as analytical tools for modeling topics and tracking participant engagement and involvement (e.g. Wang et al. 2016; Blaszkowski 2012).

There is some work on what is called hashtag activism (e.g. Tremayne 2014; Bonilla & Rosa 2015; Jackson 2016; Mendes, Ringrose & Keller 2018) but qualitative sociolinguistic or discourse-analytic work focused on hashtags remains quite rare (but see e.g. Zappavigna 2012). In a recent study, De Cock & Pedraza (2018) show how the hashtag “#jesuis + X” (as in “#jesuisCharlie”) functionally shifts from expressing solidarity with the victims of the terror attack on the Charlie Hebdo editorial offices in Paris, 2015, to expressing cynicism and critique about hypocrisy when such forms of solidarity are being withheld from the victims of similar attacks elsewhere (as in “#jesuisIstanbul, anyone?”), or jocular and nonsensical uses as in “#jesuisCafard” (“I am a hangover”). Observe that the corpus used in De Cock & Pedraza’s study was multilingual, and that the “French” origins of “#jesuis + X” did not impede fluency of usage across language boundaries – the hashtag operates translingually.

We can draw a simple but fundamental insight from De Cock & Pedraza’s study: the functions of hashtags are unstable, changeable and dynamically productive. The same hashtag can be functionally reordered and redeployed whenever the topical field of the hashtag changes (or can be seen to be changing). In the analysis of De Cock & Pedraza, “#jesuis + X” shifts from an emblematic sign of (emotional and political) alignment to one of disalignment and even distancing. This shift in function instantiates *mature enregisterment* in that it offers different but related interactional stances to users; the hashtag “#jesuis + X” has become a lexicalized but elastic signifier enabling and marking a variety of forms of footing within a

connected thematic domain (cf; Agha 2005). It is, to adopt Goffman's (1975) terms now, a *framing device*, enregistered as such within a globally circulating and, of course, translingual, social media supervenacular. De Cock & Pedraza call the functions they described for the #jesuis + X hashtag "pragmatic". As framing devices, however, hashtags are *metapragmatic* as well, they are interactionally established elements of voicing (Agha 2005). And the latter takes us to the core of my argument.

Functions of hashtags are interactionally established and should not be seen as simply the activation of latent and stable meaning potential. Seen from an action perspective, the different forms of footing enabled by a hashtag such as "#jesuis + X" represent different forms of communicative action within what Goffman called a "realm" – a "meaningful universe sustained by the activity" (1975: 46). At first glance, the difference between this formulation and the prior ones centering on contextualization, (dis)alignment and enregisterment seems minimal; in actual fact, the shift is quite substantial. We now move away from an analytical perspective focused on participants and resources (as in De Cock & Pedraza's analysis) to one in which concrete actions are central and seen as the points from which both the participants' roles and the values of the resources used in interaction *emerge* (cf. also Cicourel 1973; Garfinkel 2002; Goodwin & Goodwin 1992, 2004; Szabla & Blommaert 2018). Enregisterment, from this action perspective, does not only stand for the formation of registers-as-resources but also as the emerging of *formats for communicative action*, in which such formats also include the ratification of participants and the concrete mode of effective deployment of semiotic resources. Formats are framed patterns of social action, and I believe I stay very close to what Goffman suggested when I define framing as exactly that: the ordering of interactional conduct in ways that value both the roles of participants and the actual resources deployed in interaction between them.

3. #justsaying as action: basics

I will illustrate this by means of examples of the interactional deployment of the hashtag #justsaying. This hashtag – manifestly English in origin – is widely used on Twitter (also in variants such as #JustSayin, #justsayingg), also in non-English messages.³ And contrary to most other hashtags, it is *not* a topical marker but an explicitly metapragmatic one. The

³ I collected a small corpus of #justsaying examples from my own Twitter account between March and August 2018 (N=186), and found the hashtag incorporated into English, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, Hindi, Bulgarian and Arabic tweets. Hashtags are also (and increasingly) used offline in marches and other forms of public demonstrations, and in advertisements.

expression “just saying”, in offline vernacular interaction, often indexes consistency in viewpoint and factual certainty in the face of counterargument (Craig & Sanusi 2000). Let us take a look at what can be done with it on Twitter, and concentrate on the types of action it can contribute to. In what follows, I shall use examples of #justsaying deployed in Dutch-language tweets from Belgium and The Netherlands, followed by approximate English translations. Note that there is no Dutch equivalent to #justsaying used on Twitter: it is a fully enregistered element in “Dutch” Twitter discourse.

I must first identify some basic actions performed and performable by means of #justsaying.

3.1. *Standalone act*

A first observation is that #justsaying is very often used for a *standalone communicative act*: a tweet which is not part of a Twitter “thread” (a series of interactionally connected tweets) but which appears as an individual statement, as in example 1.



Example 1: After weeks of only pictures about the heat, all media are now swamped with pictures and videos with rain, thunder and lightning. #justsaying

Those are standalone communicative acts, but evidently they are not without contextualization cues. In this tweet from early August 2018, the timing is the cue, as the author refers to the end of the heatwave that swept over Western Europe in that period. Contextualization can also take a more explicit shape, as when authors use topical hashtags tying their standalone statement into larger thematic lines (example 2).



Example 2: suggestion for #fgov ... reinstate national service to enable our children to defend themselves against the aggressive #islam in our #europe. Matter of time before our #democracy has to be defended #manumilitari⁴ #justsaying

In example 2, we saw that the standalone statement has an indirectly called-out and identified addressee, the Belgian Government, hashtagged as #fgov. Specific addressees can of course be directly called out through the use of the standard symbol “@”, and tweets by default have the author’s followers as audiences. Thus, a standalone communicative act does not equal a decontextualized act nor an act that doesn’t invite uptake from addressees. On social media, standalone communicative acts are *interactional* by definition, for the congregation of one’s Twitter followers (or a section thereof) will see the tweet on their timelines anyway, and they respond by means of “likes”, “retweets” or “comments”, as we can see in examples 1 and 2. I shall return to this point of addressee responses in greater detail below and underscore its importance.

The main point here is: such standalone tweets are, thus, *framed* in Goffman’s sense. They engage with existing “realms” and select participants. And what they do within such meaningful units and in relation to ratified participants is to signal a particular footing: a self-initiated, detached, factual but critical, sometimes implicitly offensive statement not directly prompted by the statements of others and often proposed as the start of a series of responsive acts by addressees. They trigger and flag from within a recognizable universe of meaningful acts (the registers we use on Twitter and the communities we use them with) a specific *format of action* involving particular forms of “congregational work”, the work we do in order to make sense of social actions and establish them as social facts (Garfinkel 2002: 245). We can paraphrase the format as:

“here I am with my opinion, which I state in a critical, sober and detached way unprompted by others, and which I offer to you for interactional uptake”.

Let me stress this point once more: standalone acts such as those are not *isolated* or *non-interactional*, they are fully social acts performed in a collective of participants who know how to make sense of #justsaying action formats and their concrete contextualized instances. They merely *initiate* such action formats and, in that sense, provide an initial definition of their main ordering parameters.

⁴ “fgov” is the Twitter name of the Belgian Federal Government; “manu military” means “by the use of military force”. The author of this tweet is a former MP for a Flemish extreme right-wing party.

3.2. Sidetracking and reframing

When #justsaying is interactionally deployed in a thread, we see partly different things. What remains stable is the sober and detached footing we encountered in the standalone instances. But very different formats of action are triggered and flagged by it. And before we engage with these formats of action, I must return to a particularly important feature of the examples that will follow: the duality of addressees. In a thread, an author responds directly to previous tweets and to those identifiable participants involved in those previous tweets. But the individual response tweet also attracts responses from other addressees: the likes and (sometimes) retweets and comments from participants not directly operating within that specific thread. Consider example 3.



Example 3: (response to @X and @Y): I’m not saying that something is wrong with large farms. Just pointing out that 200 cows are peanuts compared to the numbers in Canada. No attack. No judgment. #JustSaying⁵

While the author directly responds to two other participants (@X and @Y), her tweet receives a retweet and two likes from different Twitter users. This is important, for we see *two separate lines of congregational work* here: one line performed between the author and her two called-out and identified interlocutors, the authors of previous tweets; another line performed between the author and addressees not involved in the thread but responding, very much in the way described for standalone acts, to the author’s specific tweet. Two frames co-occur here, and this is important for our understanding of what follows.

⁵One can note the explicit description of the footing for #justsaying statements here: “No attack. No judgment. #JustSaying”.

A format of action frequently triggered and flagged by #justsaying in Twitter threads is “sidetracking”, or more precisely, *opening a second line of framing*. The thematic universe of the thread is disrupted by the introduction of another one, initiated on the same detached and sober footing as the standalone cases I discussed above (example 4):



Example 4:

(participant 1) Can anyone ask @X whether she can unblock me?

(participant 2, responding to participant 1) Me too ... I don't think I ever reacted against her ... strange bitch

(participant 3, responding to participants 1, 2) Calling women ‘bitch’ seems to me to be cause for blocking. #justsaying

(participant 2, responding to participant 3) strange madam ok then?

The topic launched by participant 1 is not uncommon among active Twitter users: a complaint about being blocked by someone, @X, articulated here as an appeal to others to help being unblocked by @X. The direct response to this comes from participant 2, who endorses what participant 1 says by expanding the case: he, too, was blocked by @X, apparently for no good reason. In this response, participant 2 uses the term ‘bitch’ (‘wif’), and this leads to the #justsaying reframing action by participant 3. From the actual case proposed by participant 1 as the topic of the thread, participant 3 shifts to an entirely different one related to the use of derogatory and sexist terminology within the moral framework of ‘proper’ Twitter usage. The shift, thus, is more than just topical: it reorders the entire normative pattern of interaction. Participant 2 immediately responds defensively by offering an alternative, only slightly less derogatory term. A new frame has been introduced and a new format of action – from collaborative work on one topic to oppositional work on another – has been started.

In opening a second line of framing, the participation framework is also redefined. In example 4, participant 1 is sidelined as soon as the #justsaying remark is made, and the direct interaction in the thread is reordered: it becomes a direct engagement of participant 3 with participant 2, and what started as a one-to-all thread becomes a one-on-one thread. A new line of action is generated by the #justsaying statement.

4. #justsaying as complex reframing

We have come to understand some of the basic actions in which #justsaying is used. Now look at example 5, an interaction started by the Mayor of Antwerp (participant 1 in the transcript) tweeting from his holiday site in Poland about the Gay Pride held in his town that day.⁶His tweet is meant as a public, one-to-all statement, and it has the expected effects: it goes viral with hundreds of “likes” and a large number of retweets. Apart from these forms of response, the tweet also develops into a thread: the Mayor gets several “comments” from participants addressed by his tweet.

⁶The Mayor is a controversial, very outspoken right-wing politician. The “victory” icon he posts at the end of his tweet is a campaign emblem of his party, and the phrase “being yourself safely” is a direct reference to the Mayor’s re-election program.



Example 5

(Participant 1) I'm still in Poland but I wish all the participants in Antwerp a great Pride. [icon]Being yourself safely and freely, that's what matters today. [icon]

(participant 2) I find the cultural promotion of extra-natural behavior not suited for a conservative party.

I have nothing againsts LGBTs, have something against their bashers, but also against publicity.

(participant 2) I grant everyone their freedom, but I find the promotion of counternatural acts entirely unacceptable.

(participant 3) Let's also prohibit publicity for traveling by plane then. People flying is a counternatural thing as well. To give just 1 example. But I'll happily provide more examples if you wish. #justsaying #WearWithPride #antwerppride
#NarrowmindedPeople

The Mayor's public salute to the Antwerp Pride (interestingly, without any topical hashtags) is critically commented on in two turns by participant 2, someone who clearly aligns himself with the right-wing conservative forces opposing the Pride. Observe that participant 2 addresses the Mayor in his responses and comments on the topic initiated by the Mayor. He stays within the frame of the initial activity, and his comments receive a number of likes as well as comments. The #justsaying comment by participant 3 is of particular interest, for it opens a new line of framing and reorders the participation framework. The Mayor is eliminated as a relevant direct addressee and the frame he started is dismissed, as the #justsaying statement by participant 3 is targeting the anti-LGBT turns made by participant 2. In addition, participant 3 connects his tweet explicitly with the Antwerp Pride by means of a string of topical hashtags. The tweet is shifted to another universe of meaning and another audience.

Like in example 4 above, the shift in participation framework is effective: participant 3 gets a reply from participant 2 after his #justsaying statement (example 6).



Example 6

(participant 2) There are less people throwing up when they see a plane, than people feeling sick when they see homosexual acts.

(participant 3) Because it suits them well. The reason ensures that a message can be shared. Now that is zum kotsen (sic). Tells a lot about people. But feel free to move to Russia if it annoys you that much.

A new format of action has been started: an escalating, one-on-one fight between both participants, on the issue of what constitutes or doesn't constitute "counternatural" conduct.

But there is more. The topical hashtags in participant 3's tweet caused a bigger shift in audience and universe of meaning, and so we get different lines of congregational work here. while participant 3 enters into an argument with participant 2, his #justsaying statement gets eight "likes" and a retweet from Twitter users not otherwise active in this thread. So, parallel to the one-on-one thread developing within a one-to-all interaction started by the Mayor, another one-to-all thread emerges, inviting very different forms of response.

We see the full complexity here of the actions involved in reframing, and we can represent them graphically (Figure 1). On Twitter, what we see is a thread opened by the Mayor's one-to-all tweet which triggers collective as well as individual responses, all of it within the frame initiated by the tweet (Frame 1 in figure 1). The thread, therefore, is a unit of action, but a composite and unstable one.⁷ Because the #justsaying comment by participant 3 shapes, within the thread, a different frame (Frame 2 in figure 1). In Frame 2, we also see collective as well as individual responses – we see the same genres of action, in other words – but they are performed in a frame shaped by the #justsaying statement by participant 3. This frame is only indirectly related to Frame 1, and it draws participant 2 – who reacted initially within Frame 1 to the Mayor's tweet – into a different role and position, with a different interlocutor and with (partly) different audiences, on a different topic. The reframing of the actions means that they are thoroughly *reformatted*: while, formally, the participants in Frames 1 and 2 appear to do very similar things, the difference in frame turns their actions into very different kinds of normatively judged congregational work, creating different social facts.

⁷ In Szabla & Blommaert (2018) we analyzed a long discussion on Facebook and called the entire discussion (composed of the update, comments and subcomments) the “main action”. In a more traditional sociolinguistic vocabulary, one can also see the overall unit of action the “event”.

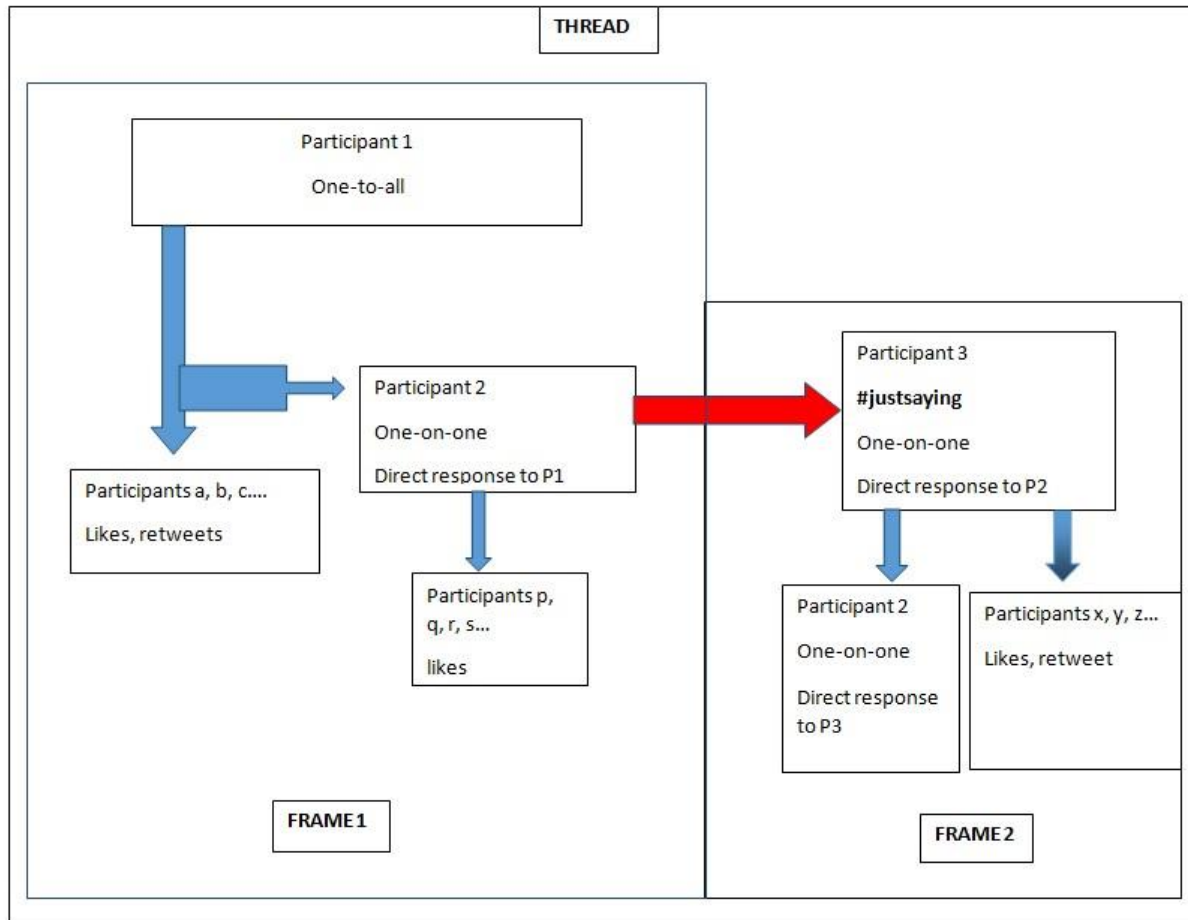


Figure 1: complex reframing actions in examples 5-6

What we see in this examples is how the hashtag #justsaying appears to “open up” a seemingly unified and straightforward activity to different forms of social action invoking, and thus proleptically scripting, different modes of participation and different modes of uptake, appraisal and evaluation. It interjects, so to speak, entirely different formats of action into a Goffmanian “realm”, enabling the shaping of very different “meaningful universes sustained by the activity”. As a framing device, #justsaying is thus more than a pragmatic-and-metapragmatic tool. It is something that proleptically signals various allowable modes of conduct and various forms of ratified participation and congregational work in social activities that appear, from a distance, simple and unified.

5. Hashtags and translanguaging revisited

The latter remark takes us to fundamental issues in methodology. Many years ago, Goodwin & Goodwin (1992: 96) told us that “there are great analytical gains to be made by looking very closely at how particular activities are organized”. They made that point in a paper that

demonstrated that what is usually perceived as one activity – a “conversation”, for instance – actually contains and is constructed out of a dense and complex web of distinct smaller actions, all of which have important contextualizing dimensions and many of which reorder the patterns of roles and normative scripts assumed by the participants. About participants, the Goodwins (2004) later also observed that the frequent use of generalizing category labels such as “speaker” and “addressee” again obscure important differences and shifts in the actual actions performed by participants in social interaction. One is not always an “addressee” *in the same way* during a speech by a “speaker”, for instance: sometimes one is a distant addressee, at other moments an involved one; one’s response behavior can be cool and detached at times and deeply engaged and emotional at others, positively sanctioning specific parts of the talk and negatively sanctioning others. The appeal launched (and continuously reiterated) by the Goodwins was for *precision in analyzing social action* as a key methodological requirement for discourse analysis, something they shared with the likes of Garfinkel and Goffman, and something that motivated my efforts in this paper. I tried to demonstrate that the interactional deployment of the hashtag #justsaying involved multiple and complexly related forms of social action, including the profound reframing of activities in such ways that morphologically similar actions (e.g. “likes” or comments) are formatted differently – they are part of different modes of making sense of what goes on.

The complexity of such discursive work, performed by means of a hashtag productive across the boundaries of conventionally established languages, to me demonstrates advanced forms of enregisterment and, by extension, of communicative competence (cf Agha 2005, 2007). This implies – it *always* implies – advanced forms of socialization, for enregisterment rests on the indexical recognizability of specific semiotic forms within a community of users who have acquired sufficient knowledge of the normative codes that provide what Goffman called “a foundation for form” (1975: 41). Translated into the discourse of translingualism, the complexity of discursive work performed by means of #justsaying demonstrates how translingual forms of this type have acquired a “foundation”, in Goffman’s terms, and operate as enregistered, “normal” features of semiotic repertoires within a community of users. Such users are able to recognize #justsaying (even across language boundaries) as indexing a shift in interactional conduct, introducing a different frame and allowing different forms of footing in what might follow. Translingual practice of this kind is an established social fact.

But recall the compelling appeal by the Goodwins: we must be precise here. The rules for such translingual practices as were reported here are not generic, they are *specific* to concrete

chronotopically configured situations of social media communication: interactions on Twitter. The community of users, likewise, is ratified as competent in the use of such forms of discursive practice only within that area of social life – the valuation of their competence cannot be generalized or extrapolated without elaborate empirical argument. And so the translingual practice I have described here is a *niche*d social fact, part (but only part) of the communicative economies of large numbers of people occasionally entering that niche.

The niche is new: at the outset of this paper I insisted that the use of hashtags in the way described here is a 21st century innovation, an expansion and complication of existing communicative economies. Which is why I find it exceedingly interesting, for novelty means that people have to *learn* rules that are not explicitly codified yet; they have to actually engage in the practices and perform the congregational work required for an emerging code of adequate performance, in order to acquire a sense of what works and what doesn't. They cannot draw on existing sets of norms of usage. My analysis of #justsaying has, I believe, shown that the use of hashtags cannot be seen as an extension and continuation of prior forms of usage of the symbol “#” – the symbol is used in ways that are specific to the social media niche that emerged in the last couple of decades, and the rules for its deployment are, thus, developed through congregational work performed by people who had no pre-existing script for its usage. As mentioned before, the value of semiotic resources (such as the hashtag) and the identities of its users (as competent members of a community of users) emerge out of the actions performed.

In that sense and from that methodological perspective, the use of hashtags directs our attention to fundamental aspects of the organization of social life, of meaning making, of interaction, and of language. There is room now for a theorization of translingualism in which, rather than to the creative bricolage of cross-linguistic resources, we focus on complex and niche'd social actions in which participants try to observe social structure through their involvement in situations requiring normatively ratified practice – I'm paraphrasing Cicourel (1973) here – in emerging and flexible communities populating these niches of the online-offline nexus.

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